

## Using Core Historical Thinking Concepts in an Elementary History Methods Course<sup>1</sup>

Daisy Martin

*Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, George Mason University*

“I’M CONFUSED. I found another book about Ben Franklin and he really sounds different in that one. He was kind of a joker, but I thought he was this inventor guy, really serious and smart.” Maya, a third-grader, was doing a report on Ben Franklin. She had been given a book to use in her report, but as an avid reader, she had read another on Franklin after finding it at the school library. “Just use the one I gave you,” her teacher replied, “that information should be enough for your project.”

Knowledgeable history teachers see an opportunity in Maya’s question—a chance to talk about complexity and challenge Maya to further investigate Franklin. People are complex—could Franklin have been both joker and serious inventor? History is complex—how do we make sense of contrasting stories of the past? Understanding history can empower teachers not only to identify “seeds for exploration” in students’ comments like Maya’s, but also to generate ideas about how to make the most of them.<sup>2</sup>

In an examination of how content knowledge influenced her initial third grade social studies teaching experiences, Suzanne Wilson found that it, among other things, helped her “to hear what students say” and in her students’ comments were “often...the seeds of complex and sophisticated historical ideas.”<sup>3</sup> She also found content knowledge to be critical in engaging her students in “genuine social science and historical problems.”<sup>4</sup>

But content knowledge, by itself, was insufficient; knowledge of other domains like curriculum and how students learn were also necessary. In other words, Wilson found content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge necessary to effectively engage and challenge her students in learning history and social studies.<sup>5</sup> Both of these knowledge domains include an understanding not only of the products of the historical discipline, but also of its processes—an understanding of what many call “historical thinking.”

If preparing teachers to teach for historical thinking is wise practice, as argued in the previous essays of this edition of *The History Teacher*, then this cannot be an approach only for secondary teacher education. We must also involve teacher educators preparing multiple-subjects candidates—the future elementary teaching force. Moving away from a vision of teaching history as imparting a single master narrative towards a vision where students successfully adjudicate between multiple stories requires that this vision, this end-goal, be clear for primary school teachers, even if how they contribute to that learning goal will look different from secondary education.

Below, I report on my first experiences with preparing preservice candidates to teach elementary students both disciplinary processes of history and the products of those processes. I first describe contexts for my course and how they shaped my instructional goals. I then describe some of my instruction and curriculum focused on these goals. I explain four key ways I conceptualized aspects of historical thinking (multiple stories, historical context, fact versus fiction, and the claim-evidence connection) and argue for the necessity of such framing. These concepts fulfill a variety of purposes in encouraging and allowing candidates to teach for historical thinking, including illuminating discipline-specific literacy practices. Finally, I discuss some student work in relation to my approach. I share my story in the spirit of reflective practice. I hope that it can help others think through their courses and that, in conjunction with research studies and high-quality teaching resources, we can build a bank of teaching practices and approaches that will result in multiple-subjects candidates being excited and prepared to teach their young students the vital thinking processes inherent in history.

There are bodies of research and teaching resources that can inform the design and implementation of an elementary history methods course focused on preparing teachers to teach for historical thinking. Studies that investigate students’ historical understanding not only show that focused instruction can foster elementary students’ historical thinking, but also offer examples of that thinking and ideas for instructional methods.<sup>6</sup> Research investigating elementary history/social studies teacher education is

relatively scarce compared to secondary teacher education, but some studies suggest that training in the use of primary sources supports elementary candidates in including historical analysis tasks in their curricula.<sup>7</sup> Levstik and Barton's *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools* is a comprehensive resource for teacher educators that explains key approaches for the elementary classroom, coupled with useful pictures of practice, lists of resources, and pointers to relevant research.<sup>8</sup> Standards documents, such as those published by the National Council for Social Studies and UCLA's National Center for History in the Schools, can also offer guidance.<sup>9</sup> But an instructor new to the course still faces the daunting task of planning the specific structure and contents of such a methods course, and the stakes are high.

The landscape has been darkening over the past decade when it comes to elementary teaching of history and social studies. Federal policies that focus on reading and math as high-stakes content have contributed to a narrowing of the elementary curriculum, documented by some, felt by many others.<sup>10</sup> In California, researchers have found this narrowing further complicated by issues of educational inequality. Some evidence suggests that poorer schools with large populations of students of color are more susceptible to a restricted curriculum.<sup>11</sup>

While the enacted curriculum has narrowed, in many states, there is a robust intended history/social studies curriculum for elementary students. Most states include standards for this subject matter, and as of Fall 2010, fourteen of the twenty-six states that require history/social studies testing include elementary students in that mandate.<sup>12</sup> Although not tested before the eighth grade, California prescribes that students be taught history/social science at every grade level. But this has not stopped the narrowing of the California elementary curriculum. This political and practical context mattered to how I planned "Literacy, History, and Social Science," my first elementary history/social science methods course, as did the larger teacher education program mandates, the duration of my course, and the students enrolled in it.

### **Program, Course, and Students**

I taught this course in a graduate-level elementary teacher education program at Stanford University. After four academic quarters extending over one year, a successful candidate would graduate from the program with an M.A. in Education and a preliminary California multiple-subjects credential (California requires a post-baccalaureate year to earn a teaching credential, so these programs are graduate, rather than undergraduate programs). Students had to successfully complete the Performance

Assessment for California Teachers (PACT), a state-wide evaluation, to receive their preliminary credentials.<sup>13</sup> The program was relatively new, in its fourth year, and relatively small, with twenty-three students in the 2010-2011 cohort and twenty-four in the 2011-2012 group. I draw on experiences and student work from both cohorts in this essay.

The course's title, "Literacy, History, and Social Science" intentionally reflected California's curriculum standards with its use of the term "social science" rather than "social studies," while broadcasting that literacy was central to these disciplines. A "mini-course," it lasted only seven weeks and took place during the final ten weeks of the program. As part of the course, candidates needed to complete a subject-specific assessment or "content assessment task"—planning a lesson that showed proficiency in the competencies identified on the rubric created by PACT. Candidates would begin their two weeks of independent student teaching during the course, after a year of graduated induction and increasing responsibility in the classroom.

The teacher education programs (both elementary and secondary) at this institution had a focus on teaching historical thinking in the history/social science methods courses. I had been part of a team who redesigned the secondary course approximately seven years prior, and we had also consulted with the elementary program developers about the focus and content of the elementary methods course in history and social studies.<sup>14</sup>

Before each first class, I used an electronic survey to find out about candidates' background and experiences with history as well as to catch a glimpse of their incoming beliefs about the teaching of it.<sup>15</sup> As might be expected in a multiple-subjects credentialing program, only two of twenty-three candidates in the 2010-2011 cohort had history degrees. Ten students had majored in a social science, three in sociology, and five in psychology. The remaining eleven students held a variety of majors, including science, math, education, history of art, and ethnic studies. More than half the candidates (twelve) had taken two or three university-level history courses and four candidates had taken six or more. Five students had taken one course and two students had not taken any. I judged these results as encouraging since I was prepared to find little, if any, experience with history coursework beyond high school. However, it was clear that my students brought varied depths of historical understanding to my class.

The candidates reported seeing little instruction in history in their existing placements, where they had been spending Monday through Thursday mornings since the beginning of the semester. Nine students of twenty-three (or just shy of 40%) reported that they saw students engaged with historical content less than one hour a week. Another nine

students reported one to two hours a week routinely spent with history, for a whopping 78.2% who were seeing history taught fewer than two hours weekly. No candidate was seeing more than four hours and only two (approximately 9%) reported three to four hours routinely spent on history. Candidates' comments about this issue were telling. One explained, "I am currently in a first grade classroom," and another clarified, "social studies will be integrated into the curriculum in the coming month." Both of these comments supported the notion that teaching history/social science would be an exceptional event, rather than a typical one. These teacher candidates were seeing the narrowed curriculum that others had documented.

### **Instructional Goals**

These contexts helped shape my instructional goals. First and foremost, I wanted to help students become committed to teaching this subject in their future classrooms. Candidates would need to understand the value of the subject matter, and see it as a vital and indispensable part of the elementary curriculum. Whether they eventually taught in a school where colleagues blithely disregarded history/social science; where administrators pressured teachers to focus on reading and math and omit the non-tested, lower-stakes subjects; or where history was a central part of the curriculum, I wanted these candidates to be ready and able to teach history in their own classrooms and become professionals who could not be dissuaded otherwise.

Secondly, candidates, most of whom had little academic experience in the discipline, would need to begin to understand history as an interpretive discipline that went beyond the "school history" of knowing a list of historical names, dates, and dramatic events.<sup>16</sup> They would need to move towards a vision of history that put historical thinking front and center.

Thirdly, I needed to provide visions of best practices in my course, since the majority of these candidates were seeing little, if any, history being taught, let alone coherent and powerful history instruction. Additionally, the odds were that candidates' "apprenticeships of observation" (their earlier experiences as students of history that taught them what history education looked like)<sup>17</sup> only reinforced the notion that history was a subject that was studied through textbooks and worksheets and that essentially required learning a single story about the past.

Fourthly, I wanted my students to leave the course more familiar with and knowledgeable about instructional and curricular approaches, tools, and resources for teaching K-5 history and historical thinking. Given that when surveyed, nineteen of twenty-three candidates had disagreed with the statement, "I am familiar with digital resources for teaching history to

elementary students,” I would emphasize these easily accessible digital resources. Candidates needed to see and learn that teaching for historical thinking was possible and understand some developmentally appropriate and curriculum-friendly ways to do so.

All four goals were obviously intertwined as, for example, without understanding the discipline, it would be difficult for candidates with little experience with history to embrace the subject as important for their own students to learn. Without visions of best practice and practical tools for implementing the same, it would be hard to convince any candidate to leave behind the history-as-a-single-story approach. These goals line up with those appropriate to a secondary history methods course, but elementary instructors alone face the possibility that this is a discipline that would be missing from the curriculum.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

Given the candidates’ lack of experience and education in history, I needed to look bifocally at my lessons, assignments, and readings. In seven short weeks, I hoped candidates would learn more about the historical discipline and the thinking inherent to it, *and* how to teach the same to young students. This is a challenge when working with any history methods course, even when candidates had earned undergraduate history degrees or had taken multiple history methods courses throughout their teacher preparation.<sup>18</sup> How was I to accomplish this in only twenty hours of class?

I had taught secondary methods courses focused on teaching historical thinking for nine years when I initially taught this elementary course, and given the courses’ shared issue of challenging and shifting candidates’ partial or comprehensive views of history as a single, uncontested story, I borrowed components of successful lessons from my secondary experience. The first class session focused on the question, “What is history?” Candidates briefly wrote about a memorable history lesson or teacher, either good or bad. We then launched into our first demonstration lesson.

Candidates became “students” and engaged with a document-based lesson investigating the central question, “Did Pocahontas rescue John Smith?” Using an inquiry lesson format, “students” engaged in an iterative process of historical investigation, albeit in a bounded and planned way.<sup>19</sup> They accessed background information, including where and when these historic figures encountered one another, and in small groups, they then considered how successive sets of evidence answered the central question. They eliminated or revised their answers as each new set of evidence added

to, or complicated, students' initial story. These sets of evidence included the Disney film version of this "rescue," excerpts from Smith's conflicting accounts, and adapted historians' arguments.

I chose to start with this activity since it engaged students in investigating history and included clear examples of key aspects of such investigation, including a historical question, primary and secondary sources, contesting accounts that demand interrogation, and uncertainty. Additionally, the activity provided a picture of the process, even if a bounded and prepared one, of historical investigation.

The debrief started with candidates writing down what they did during the activity. They compared this list with their description of a memorable history teacher or lesson, which launched us into a conversation about their prior experiences with the subject matter and how they may need to rethink influential "apprenticeships of observation," and consider the differences between history and "heritage."<sup>20</sup> I identified key aspects of the activity relevant to creating opportunities for historical thinking, including the use of multiple accounts and requiring evidence to support claims. I also identified key aspects of the activity relevant to engaging young or inexperienced students in historical thinking, including carefully selected and prepared texts and sources, opportunities to talk about those texts, challenges to prior knowledge, and scaffolds such as background knowledge, graphic organizers, and guiding questions.

This activity would serve as touchstone for subsequent lessons, providing concrete examples of many of the course's key ideas, theories, and tools. Candidates liked the activity, and using it in the first hour of my course sent an immediate message about the nature of the discipline that we were here to study and teach. It was not about receiving and remembering, it was about analyzing, questioning, and constructing. These kinds of activities—focused on "What is history?"—are important beginnings for a course.<sup>21</sup> Their primary significance does not lie in the particular historical question, nor in the facts that the students are learning—rather, it lies in their potential to lay bare and discuss the nature of the discipline, challenging students' prior conceptions of it.

In the first two weeks, I used additional activities and readings to reinforce and extend this lesson. Candidates read short articles that linked history to thinking and literacy and focused on students' investigating and questioning.<sup>22</sup> We used "snapshot autobiographies" they had created for the first class to talk about issues of selection, perspective, and coherence in constructing a historical narrative.<sup>23</sup> I introduced the historical reading framework of sourcing, contextualization, corroboration, and close reading. Then, using sample reading questions and videos of historians and students thinking aloud while reading, we distinguished these disciplinary

strategies from more generic reading strategies such as summarizing and identifying main ideas.<sup>24</sup> Candidates became students for another demonstration lesson that modeled the “Opening Up the Textbook” lesson format, a lesson that uses one to two short sources to complicate a piece of the textbook’s narrative.<sup>25</sup> All of this instruction was meant to teach candidates about the discipline of history and to challenge constricted understandings of it, while also providing models and tools for teaching historical thinking.

Additionally, I connected these ways of thinking to civic purposes and goals. If candidates were to embrace history as a necessary subject for elementary students to learn, they needed to begin to understand its value beyond their classroom walls. Candidates read two contrasting newspaper articles about a current event to highlight how they used historical reading skills to understand each piece, recognize the differences between them, and to generate questions. We discussed how specific aspects of the process of doing history were also important to nurturing prepared civic participants. For example, both historical thinking and civic-mindedness require questioning sources, identifying and evaluating arguments, and seeking evidentiary explanations. We made connections between academic achievement, sophisticated reading skills, and accessing important career, college, and civic opportunities. Learning how disadvantaged California students were possibly losing out on learning history because of a narrowed curriculum highlighted connections between educational equity and history teaching.

My purposes and plans overlapped with secondary methods courses given the common goal of disciplinary refocusing. But there was also a clear and significant distinction from the same. While the two model lesson templates (“Inquiry” and “Opening Up the Textbook”) could be used with fifth- or sixth-graders, they were not necessarily suited for younger students. As with all of my major lessons in this course, examples of what this kind of teaching might look like with younger students, grades K-3, were necessary. So, to complement the John Smith/Pocahontas inquiry, we watched a video of a teacher using John Smith’s map of the Chesapeake and a more contemporary map of the same area to prompt third-graders to investigate the question, “What is important to John Smith?”<sup>26</sup> This was not ideal, as the cognitive and academic gaps between a first-grader and third-grader are substantial. For the opening up the textbook model, I demonstrated how images might be used to open up informational text to promote inquiry.

As my course progressed, we moved from focusing on “What is history?” and “Why teach it?” to “How do I teach history and historical thinking to my students?”<sup>27</sup> We considered the contexts of elementary history/social

science by looking selectively at state and national standards, reading about the narrowing curriculum, and exploring and reviewing digital sites for teaching elementary history.<sup>28</sup> Readings from Zarnowski and Parker, research done by Wills and Schweber, and lesson ideas from Levstik and Barton and the Harvard Zero Project helped us with this question.<sup>29</sup> We looked at some common student misconceptions about frequently taught elementary topics like “Indians,” and considered the role of fiction in history teaching.<sup>30</sup> Candidates’ explored their roles as civic educators in a Socratic Seminar on the Pledge of Allegiance as well as by examining a video of a teacher engaging elementary students in “participatory action research.”<sup>31</sup> We addressed the central role of time and place in history by considering how general reading strategies differed from more-specific historical reading strategies and by practicing lesson planning with maps and timelines.

### **Framing Historical Thinking**

While my curriculum and instruction addressed multiple topics, there were a few conceptual understandings I spiraled and came back to repeatedly.<sup>32</sup> Most significant were the key ways I conceptualized and talked about historical thinking. I wanted to identify aspects and components of historical thinking that could be used by candidates to name essential features of historical thinking for their students, make curricular and instructional choices, and further their own understanding of disciplinary processes. These concepts needed to frame historical thinking without oversimplifying it, while being both useful for understanding these habits of mind *and* teaching them. Moreover, the concepts needed to have power not only for fifth grade teaching, but also for teaching kindergartners. I needed flexible, versatile concepts that could help candidates build conceptual frameworks for history and teaching history, and that each candidate could use to “organize knowledge in ways that facilitate retrieval and application.”<sup>33</sup>

What follows are explanations of four concepts that I found most useful in teaching my elementary history/social science methods course: multiple stories and accounts, historical context focusing on locating historical phenomena in time and space, fact versus fiction, and claim-evidence.<sup>34</sup>

#### *Multiple Stories*

History as story is a familiar idea to both the layperson and those trained in the discipline. However, this vision of history is often connected to the transmission mode of teaching history and the textbook’s narrative can become that *de facto* story. Shifting from thinking about one story

to multiple stories is an elegant and useful way to pivot from history as finished, certain, and simple to history as complex, interpretive, and procedural.<sup>35</sup> So rather than only learning the story of Paul Revere, the nighttime rider who Longfellow made iconic, students can also encounter stories about William Dawes and Samuel Prescott, men who joined Revere the night of April 18, 1775. The story of Sybil Ludington, a sixteen-year-old girl who rode on April 26, 1777, to similarly warn the minutemen of the approach of British troops, can be added to the mix. Teachers and students can start to ask, when studying a historical event, person, or era, “What do other stories tell us about this topic?”

Multiple stories might focus on different aspects of an event or person’s life, contradict one another, or represent different perspectives on an event, both during the occurrence and in hindsight. Teachers can read picture books to young elementary students about such popular figures as George Washington or Rosa Parks and help students identify how different authors chose to include and highlight different aspects and details of these heroes’ lives. Grappling with contradictory accounts regarding the same event such as the Boston Massacre or the “rescue” of John Smith can engage upper-elementary grade students, as can considering whose perspective or experiences might be missing from a single story. In any case, teachers can help students understand that history is made up of multiple stories and accounts and that understanding the past means consulting varied sources, thus setting the stage for more sophisticated thinking about historical accounts in subsequent years.

This frame of multiple stories and accounts also helped deepen candidates’ understanding of history. In both years I taught this course, there were instances in which candidates expressed frustration and sometimes anger at one-sided views of history that they saw presented by texts in their placements. Whether it was a story of the California missions that focused on architecture and settlement without acknowledging the consequences of that settlement on local Indian tribes, or the celebration of “Squanto” as guide for the Pilgrims without any mention of his kidnapping or the decimation of his tribe by disease, candidates asked, “How can I get the ‘truth’ back into the curriculum? Which book can I use to tell my students the ‘truth?’” While I didn’t have the offending texts in front of me, I doubted they were all patently false stories.<sup>36</sup> Using the idea of multiple stories helped move this conversation away from a “wrong” or “right” story to how competing and incomplete accounts are a part of history and we cannot do away with them. However, we can learn to distinguish which stories and interpretations are valid and which are not (evidence and accuracy are key), how perspectives and a chosen narrative arc shape the story, and how this complexity is an integral part of the discipline. Using

the multiple stories concept helped candidates look beyond any single account for a complete truth about the past, while offering a practical approach to constructing historical thinking lessons.

### *Historical Context*

Historical context can be a challenge to teach, but as Ira Berlin (2004) asserted, “For the historian, context is all.”<sup>37</sup> In history, where and when it happened or was created always matters.<sup>38</sup> It matters in sophisticated ways, such as when we understand that free-soilers in the antebellum era were not anti-slavery because they were concerned about issues of equality, but because they were anti-competition from freed blacks. It also matters in more concrete and, for the elementary student, accessible ways. If we lived 150 years ago, we would not know what it was like to have electric lights that burned through the night. The sport of surfing did not develop in Kansas for good reason. Space and time are coordinates of history and we must always locate historical sources and phenomenon in that matrix. If elementary students learned that they needed to ask questions such as, “When did this happen? When was this created? Where was this produced or experienced? Why does this matter?”, this would be laying an important foundation for grappling with history in the future. While merely establishing where and when something happened or was created does not nearly capture or complete the skill of historical contextualization, it is a concrete step towards it for early elementary students, as they learn that these are two components that matter. These key coordinates of historical events also connect to important tools of history and the social sciences that even the youngest students can work with: maps and timelines. Candidates worked in grade-level groups to identify key components of each tool that students would need to know and then sketched an appropriate lesson using the tool. Groups shared these lessons and we discussed how and why particular approaches were suited to particular historical topics and grade levels. The concept of historical context—and, more specifically locating events and sources in space and time—looked different when being applied to different grade levels and students, but focused candidates on historical analysis processes.

### *Fact versus Fiction*

My third key historical thinking concept was the distinction between fact and fiction—a critical understanding for learning history.<sup>39</sup> Stories have different purposes, and historical stories are intended to be truthful and accurate while simultaneously being grounded in evidence and fact. Fiction has no such restrictions. This difference can be used both to introduce the nature of historical stories as different from other stories and to get

at another concept key to historical thinking and useful for elementary teaching and deepening candidates' understanding of the nature of the historical discipline: the claim-evidence connection.

### *Claim-Evidence*<sup>40</sup>

While the language of “claim-evidence” may seem sophisticated for young students, this cornerstone idea in doing history and historical thinking can be tailored to the ages and abilities of the full gamut of K-8 students. For example, I introduced to candidates a thinking routine called see-think-wonder.<sup>41</sup> Candidates, in the role of students, looked carefully at an object (e.g., a corn chip) and described it. Shape, colors, odor, feel, they slowed down and spent some quality time examining a single chip. They then generated inferences and questions related to this object. I recorded responses in the appropriate column, either the “see” (observation), “think” (claims and inferences), or “wonder” (questions) column. When a candidate stated that they thought it was a chip made of varied kinds of corn, I recorded it in the “think” column and asked for the evidence she or he used to generate that idea. Candidates learned that asking questions such as “Why do you say that?” or “What evidence supports that thought?” helps students start to learn how to construct evidentiary claims. Using K-W-L charts with an image or object was a strategy that worked similarly.<sup>42</sup> These strategies did triple duty as they also demonstrated ways to teach students how to analyze single sources through close observation and how to use a source as a springboard towards further investigation.

## **Literacy**

Multiple stories, historical context, fact versus fiction, and claim-evidence: I found these concepts flexible and powerful for guiding candidates in learning more about history and how to teach for historical thinking. All of my frames connected to literacy and had implications for classroom literacy tasks. This was important in building candidates' motivation and capacity for including the teaching of historical thinking in their future classrooms. Elementary candidates think of themselves as literacy teachers and are more extensively trained in teaching literacy than secondary teachers. Teaching students to read can be wrapped up in elementary candidates' ideas about their success as teachers. By connecting the teaching of historical thinking to teaching literacy, I was connecting these habits of mind to candidates' nascent expertise as literacy teachers and beliefs about their professional roles. I was engaging their prior knowledge—a core principle of teaching for understanding.<sup>43</sup>

Practically, candidates could use these concepts to monitor and check

their curriculum and instruction for historical thinking opportunities and alignment. Imagine if Maya's teacher, when planning her project for reports on famous people, paused to focus on the teaching of historical thinking. She might have asked, "Should I require that students use multiple accounts? If so, what questions, resources, and activities will I include to help students use and compare more than one account? What about historical context? Shall I require students to include and create a map or timeline to help connect their person to larger historical eras, topics, and regions? Will I require that students make a claim about this person and use evidence to support that claim, or is reporting specific information about this person enough?" A small set of key historical thinking concepts offers some guideposts for constructing historical thinking lessons.

A recent study showed the value of using key concepts in planning and guiding elementary instruction. Fallace, Biscoe, and Perry created two units of study for Virginia second-graders that focused on teaching students about famous Americans identified in state standards.<sup>44</sup> In one action-research study, they used "temporal understanding" to plan and structure the unit's instruction and assessment. In the second action-research study, they used "multiple narratives" to do the same. In both studies, they found that with systematic instruction guided by each core concept, students not only learned about these key figures, but also developed understandings foundational to historical thinking (albeit with different levels of success). This study supports the idea that key concepts can help elementary teachers plan and deliver instruction.

What should those core concepts be? Both the above researchers and myself found some version of "multiple stories" and "temporal understanding" powerful tools, but there are obviously other possibilities.<sup>45</sup> I found that, for my particular course, these four concepts linked to discipline-specific literacy worked well. In the context of lessons and readings that demonstrated history as a process of inquiry and complex thinking, these concepts helped make the contours of the discipline more accessible for my students. They helped them investigate and learn content for their lesson plans as they sought out multiple references, evaluated them as reliable sources of content, and identified possible aspects of that content to teach their students. They also helped candidates to evaluate instructional plans and curricula for opportunities for teaching historical thinking and to construct their own such plans.

### **Student Work**

For my course's final assignment, candidates completed a subject-specific performance assessment required for California initial certification.

This consisted of planning a lesson that, among other things, “support[ed] student learning of developmentally appropriate analytic reasoning skills in history or social science.”<sup>46</sup> An important first step was for candidates to identify their lesson topic and then find sources that helped them get smarter about that topic. I tried to teach candidates how to learn about a historical topic in some depth, modeling the use of digital and print sources to do so, and having them share their own processes. To emphasize the necessity of strong content knowledge, I added to the state’s requirements that the candidates’ lessons “reflect an informed and accurate understanding of the topic and content” and include an annotated bibliography. I scaffolded the plan over a month’s classes, including segmenting candidates’ work so I provided feedback to candidates twice on their developing plans before they submitted their final plan to me and an external evaluator. Most frequently, they produced one lesson plan, but situated it within a series of plans and a larger unit. I heard back from a few students after they taught their plans. Jamie (all names are pseudonyms), a fifth grade student teacher, responded:

Just wanted to write and say that I did my...lesson on the transcontinental railroad last week. It went really well and the students surpassed my expectations at living the lives of historians. They critically analyzed the evidence and took into account the source and the time period. I look forward to doing more lessons like these!

While I could not require that candidates teach their plans (and I only heard from a few students about how they went), candidates in both cohorts produced lesson plans that showed some understanding of teaching for historical thinking. For example, Mike created a fourth grade lesson that would be part of a series he had received from his Cooperating Teacher. The series focused on migration routes from the East Coast to California during the Gold Rush. Students were reading *By the Great Horn Spoon*, a fictional account of one voyage, and Mike created a lesson in which they would cross-check this with a secondary account created by PBS Kids and an excerpt from the diary of a traveler, Dr. J. C. Tucker.<sup>47</sup> In Mike’s lesson, students identified the different kinds of sources, compared information in these sources, and would eventually take a stand with three supporting examples on whether they would have chosen the overland or sea route. Mike’s lesson used multiple stories, the distinction between fact and fiction, and the claim-evidence connection to reshape the existing lesson.

Soledad integrated her kindergartners’ lessons in the school garden with her history/social science lesson. Students studied some key features of maps and then, after some teacher modeling of the process and product, students created a map of a school garden plot. They then compared this

map to maps from years past to explore how the year of creation mattered to accuracy, and the idea that maps of the same location can change over time. Both candidates built on existing curriculum to either, in Mike's case, reshape the way history was being represented in a lesson (from fictional story to multiple accounts) or, in Soledad's case, add a historical lens.

There were also candidates who started from scratch in writing their plans. Like Soledad and several other candidates working with kindergarten and first grade, Anaid focused on maps. She framed her first grade lesson with the questions: "Why are maps made? What can we learn from maps?" After comparing two maps of California and some teacher modeling of the process of map creation, students used a supporting worksheet to create their own maps of the classroom for next year's first-graders. Half of them created maps that would help students get around the classroom, the other half created maps of what was most important in the classroom. In this and related lessons, Anaid planned to teach first-graders not only key features of a map, such as a legend and orientation, but also that maps have particular purposes and map makers have authorial choices to make.

Sylvia created a third grade lesson focusing on early local Indian tribes. She gathered images and maps from scholarly works, digital archives, and the local museum; prepared them for investigation; and then planned for students to visit each of seven "exhibits" of sources. Students filled out a graphic organizer that guided them through the process of seeing, thinking, and wondering about each exhibit. They then used this evidence to construct answers to overarching questions including: "Who lived here? How did they live? How did they use the land and resources to survive?" Sylvia's students would investigate multiple sources, identify characteristics of the place under investigation, and then construct a story using evidence.

Molly, also working with kindergarten, departed from maps. She focused on one part of the following state kindergarten standard: "Identify the purposes of, and the people and events honored in, commemorative holidays, including the human struggles that were the basis for the events (e.g.,...Martin Luther King Jr. Day...)." Molly had wondered how young students could understand the heroism of Civil Rights leaders and activists without understanding the context they were rebelling against. Yet she was concerned about the disturbing nature of that context and whether it was appropriate to teach about it. She carefully chose one image to explore closely with her kindergarteners: Fred Blackwell's 1963 photo of a crowd surrounding and dropping food on lunch counter protestors in Jackson, Mississippi. She judged this photo appropriate because it appealed to

students' "sense of what is 'fair' and 'not fair;'" it included a familiar setting since "most students will have been to a restaurant before;" and its content was "age-appropriate and not overly graphic for my young students."

As Molly developed her plan, she checked in with the Director of the program and other professional mentors about her idea. She was concerned that using the photo with kindergarteners might be exposing them to inappropriate content—content that exposed human actions and institutionalized systems that were shocking and upsetting. Indeed, one study found that protective impulses such as Molly's, what the researcher called a "discourse of protection," were an obstacle to candidates attempting to plan opportunities for their young students to interpret the past.<sup>48</sup> In that action-research study designed to uncover elementary teacher candidates' beliefs that prompt them to resist teaching interpretation in history, James found that forty-seven of her seventy students cited concerns related to the protective belief that "introducing students to the ugliness of history is morally inappropriate."<sup>49</sup> We had talked about this issue in class after reading a research article about teaching the Holocaust to third-graders, an instance of what the author labeled "curricular creep," or the phenomenon of disturbing topics being taught at younger and younger grades.<sup>50</sup> A candidate would later report that this reading brought out "some really important thorny issues." In Molly's case, the conversation may have helped her articulate and resolve her concern.

Each of these students designed a lesson that had potential to engage students in historical thinking, and showed some understanding of key aspects of disciplinary thinking. Anonymous surveys also indicated that candidates felt they had learned some important lessons. Candidates reported thinking about history "in a new way," and that "the course shifted my paradigm for thinking about history/social studies education." One reported learning that "history involves critical thinking and argument," and another learned that "there are habits of the discipline that we can teach." In response to a question about important lessons learned during the course, one candidate cited "the idea of developing student skills in analysis and argument." Another identified learning about "teaching students to source and understand that there may [be] many points of view." In fact, of the twelve out of twenty-four candidates who answered this question, all except one referred to historical processes, using one or more of the following words or phrases: inquiry, analysis, argument, primary sources, multiple perspectives, or points of view. These comments suggested that, at minimum, candidates could identify the foci of the course, and at best, they were embracing teaching historical thinking and inquiry.

Most importantly, there was some evidence that candidates were motivated to teach history in their future elementary classrooms. One

commented, “I appreciated how the teaching of history was so closely linked with critical thinking and questioning skills. I’m excited to teach history and social studies in my classroom.” Another reported, “[The course] inspired me to teach some History/Social Studies in my future classroom. This is quite a change from my original apprehension of the subject.” Field supervisors reported seeing more history instruction in candidates’ Independent Student Teaching than prior years.

### **Conclusion**

Using core concepts for framing historical understanding and thinking helped focus and strengthen my course, and helped me achieve some success in meeting my instructional goals. History is a complex discipline that is difficult to distill or learn in a few weeks, and teaching for historical thinking is not a familiar approach or idea for most multiple-subjects candidates. Models of both are needed for candidates to start on their path to becoming effective history educators; core concepts help candidates make sense of those models. I found these four concepts flexible and versatile, as they helped candidates make sense of the discipline, and plan lessons for students across the wide range of K-5 instruction. Linked to literacy, these particular concepts connected to candidates’ prior knowledge and capitalized on elementary curricular pressures, while making discipline-specific literacy practices distinct.

In this essay, I have focused on aspects of my course that I will continue to use with future cohorts as evidence and reflection suggest that they support my primary teaching goals. But I have much on my list to create a stronger and more effective course. This includes more systematic study of candidates’ evolving understandings both before and after my course, and in the early years of teaching. It also includes creating new lessons, such as one focused on designing a year-long curriculum. A candidate suggested “a day dedicated to K-2 history specifically” and both cohorts have echoed the need for more examples and tools for working with the lower elementary grades. A significant issue that I continue to face that goes beyond the scope of this paper is how to encourage and train candidates to become students of history throughout their careers and become more effective at translating new knowledge of history into classroom lessons.

One candidate put this methods course into context, saying it “would have further made social studies/history a neglected part of the curriculum in elementary schools if we had not had the opportunity to take the course.” Indeed, it would have. A seven-week course in teaching history/social science is a minimal amount of preparation and more time is

necessary, given the weighty, but necessary, goals of helping candidates reconceptualize the discipline while preparing them to educate students in interpreting and analyzing the past rather than merely remembering its details. But whatever the teaching context, engaging students in historical analysis and thinking—in ways appropriate to their ages and abilities—is too important to leave to chance.

## Notes

1. Daisy Martin is the Director of History Education at teachinghistory.org at the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, George Mason University.
2. Suzanne M. Wilson, “Mastodons, Maps, and Michigan: Exploring Uncharted Territory while Teaching Elementary School Social Studies,” *Elementary Subjects Center No. 24* (Lansing, MI: The Center for the Learning and Teaching of Elementary Subjects, 1990), 16.
3. Ibid, 16.
4. Ibid., 17.
5. Lee Shulman, “Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching,” *Educational Researcher* 15, no. 2 (February 1986): 4-14.
6. See, for example, Rosalyn Ashby, Peter J. Lee, and Denis Shemilt, “Putting Principles Into Practice: Teaching and Planning,” in *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom*, ed. M. Suzanne Donovan and John D. Bransford (Washington D.C.: National Academies Press, 2005); Elise Fillpot, “Historical Thinking in the Third Grade,” *The Social Studies* 103, no. 5 (2012); Bruce VanSledright, *In Search of America’s Past: Learning to Read History in Elementary School* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002).
7. Theresa M. McCormick and Janie Hubbard, “Every Picture Tells a Story: A Study of Teaching Methods Using Historical Photographs with Elementary Students,” *Journal of Social Studies Research* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 80-94; Scott M. Waring and Cheryl A. Franklin Torrez, “Using Digital Primary Sources to Teach Historical Perspective to Preservice Teachers,” *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education (CITE Journal)* 10, no. 3 (2010), <<http://www.citejournal.org/vol10/iss3/socialstudies/article1.cfm>>.
8. Linda Levstik, and Keith Barton, *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle Schools*, third ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005).
9. National Center for History in the Schools, *National Standards for History: Basic Edition* (Los Angeles, CA: National Center for History in the Schools, 1996); National Council for the Social Studies, *National Curriculum Standards for the Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment* (Silver Spring, MD: National Council for the Social Studies, 2010).
10. Paul G. Fitchett and Tina L. Heafner, “A National Perspective on the Effects of High-Stakes Testing and Standardization on Elementary Social Studies Marginalization,” *Theory and Research in Social Education* 38, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 114-130; Stacy Hoeflich, “Making Difficult Decisions: How Much Do We Value Elementary History

Education?" teachinghistory.org, <<http://teachinghistory.org/issues-and-research/roundtable-response/25331>>; Lisa A. Hutton and Joyce Burstein, "The Teaching of History-Social Science: Left Behind or Behind Closed Doors?" *Social Studies Research and Practice* 3, no. 1 (2008): 96-108; Jennifer McMurrer, *NCLB Year 5: Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Education Policy, 2008), <<http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=309>>; K. K. Manzo, "Social Studies Losing out to Reading, Math," *Education Week* 24, no. 27 (16 March 2005); Tracy C. Rock et al., "One State Closer to a National Crisis: A Report on Elementary Social Studies in North Carolina Schools," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 34, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 455-483.

11. Judith L. Pace, "The Complex and Unequal Impact of High Stakes Accountability on Untested Social Studies," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 39 no.1 (Winter 2011): 32-60; John S. Wills, "Putting The Squeeze on Social Studies: Managing Teaching Dilemmas in Subject Areas Excluded from State Testing," *Teachers College Record* 109, no. 8 (2007): 1980-2046.

12. I identify at least 37 states with elementary history/social studies standards using data from *Quality Counts 2012*, Special Issue of *Education Week* 31, no. 16 (12 January 2012): 53; Daisy Martin et al, *A Report on the State of History Education: State Policies and National Programs*, second ed. (Fairfax, VA: Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, 2011): 50-52; and documents retrieved from states' websites.

13. "What is PACT?" *Performance Assessment for California Teachers*, <[http://www.pactpa.org/\\_main/hub.php?pageName=Home](http://www.pactpa.org/_main/hub.php?pageName=Home)>.

14. This team was Professor Sam Wineburg, Chauncey Monte-Sano, and myself.

15. As my 2011 pre-course survey had a response rate of 100%, I use only that year's data here.

16. For example, John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); Larry Cuban, "History of Teaching in Social Studies," in *Handbook of Research on Social Studies Teaching and Learning*, ed. J. P. Shaver (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991): 197-209.

17. D. C. Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

18. See Tim Keirn and Eileen Luhr, "Subject Matter Counts: The Pre-Service Teaching and Learning of Historical Thinking;" Laura M. Westhoff, "Seeing Through the Eyes of a History Teacher;" and Linda Sargent Wood, "Hooked on Inquiry: History Labs in the Methods Course" in this issue of *The History Teacher*. Also Daisy Martin and Chauncey Monte-Sano, "Inquiry, Controversy, and Ambiguous Texts: Learning to Teach for Historical Thinking," in *History Education 101: Perspectives on the Preparation of Classroom Teachers*, ed. Wilson J. Warren and D. Antonio Cantu (Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008).

19. Sam Wineburg, Daisy Martin, and Chauncey Monte-Sano, *Reading Like a Historian: Teaching Literacy in Middle and High School History Classrooms* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011): 1-16; Stanford History Education Group, "What is an Inquiry Lesson?" *Teaching Guides*, <<http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/teaching-guides/24123>>.

20. Lortie; David Lowenthal, "Fabricating Heritage," *History and Memory* 10, no.1 (Spring 1998).

21. See Robert B. Bain, "Into the Breach," in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Denis Shemilt, *History 13-16 Evaluation Study* (Edinburgh, U.K.: Holmes McDougall, 1980); Wineburg, Martin, and

Monte-Sano; Bruce Lesh, *“Why Won’t You Just Tell Us the Answer?”: Teaching Historical Thinking in Grades 7-12* (Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2011).

22. Sam Wineburg and Daisy Martin, “Reading and Rewriting History,” *Educational Leadership* 62, no. 1 (September 2004): 42-45; Bruce A. VanSledright, “Can Ten-Year-Olds Learn to Investigate History as Historians Do?” *OAH Newsletter*, August, 2000; Myra Zarnowski, *Making Sense of History: Using High-Quality Literature and Hands-On Experiences to Build Content Knowledge* (New York: Scholastic, 2006): 18-40.

23. See Walter C. Parker, *Social Studies in Elementary Education*, thirteenth ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 2009), 123-124; Stanford History Education Group, “Curriculum: Unit 1, Introduction,” <<http://sheg.stanford.edu/?q=node/21>>.

24. For related resources, see [historicalthinkingmatters.org](http://historicalthinkingmatters.org), “Why Historical Thinking Matters” [video], <<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/why/>> and “Teacher Education Lesson: Making Thinking Visible,” <<http://historicalthinkingmatters.org/ted/lessons/making/>>.

25. For examples of this, see National History Education Clearinghouse, “Opening Up the Textbook,” *Best Practices*, <<http://teachinghistory.org/best-practices/teaching-with-textbooks/19438>>.

26. National History Education Clearinghouse, “Using Maps as Primary Sources,” *Teaching in Action*, <<http://teachinghistory.org/best-practices/teaching-in-action/15772>>.

27. Find my syllabus for 2012 at <<http://suse-step.stanford.edu/academics/elementary/curriculum-outline>>.

28. Judith Pace, “Why We Need to Save (and Strengthen) Social Studies,” *Education Week* 27, no. 16 (19 December 2007): 26-27; Digital sites included <<http://www.americancenturies.mass.edu>>, <<http://www.bringinghistoryhome.org>>, <<http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu>>, <<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-now/past-issues>>, and <<http://www.teachinghistory.org>>.

29. Levstik and Barton; Project Zero, “Visible Thinking in Action,” n.d., <[http://pzweb.harvard.edu/vt/VisibleThinking\\_html\\_files/01\\_VisibleThinkingInAction/01a\\_VTInAction.html](http://pzweb.harvard.edu/vt/VisibleThinking_html_files/01_VisibleThinkingInAction/01a_VTInAction.html)>; Parker; Simone Schweber, “‘What Happened To Their Pets?’: Third Graders Encounter The Holocaust,” *Teachers College Record* 110, no. 10 (2008): 2073-2115; John S. Wills, “Popular Culture, Curriculum, and Historical Representation: The Situation of Native Americans in American History and the Perpetuation of Stereotypes,” *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 4, no. 4 (1994): 277–294; Zarnowski.

30. Wills “Popular Culture, Curriculum, and Historical Representation,”; National History Education Clearinghouse, “What Role Should Fiction have in the U.S. History Classroom?” *Roundtables* (2011), <<http://teachinghistory.org/issues-and-research/roundtable/25284>>; Linda Levstik, “Historical Agency in History Book Sets (HBS),” *Teaching Guides*, <<http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/teaching-guides/22365>>.

31. Pio Pico Student Researchers Participatory Action Research, <[http://gallery.carnegiefoundation.org/collections/quest/collections/sites/wolk\\_emily/](http://gallery.carnegiefoundation.org/collections/quest/collections/sites/wolk_emily/)>.

32. Jerome Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960/1977).

33. M. Suzanne Donovan and John D. Bransford, eds., *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2005): 1.

34. I drew on the following in choosing concepts: experience working with elementary teachers around issues of teaching for historical thinking, guest teaching in grades 2 and 3, scholarship on teaching and learning history, materials representing best

practices, and knowledge of the discipline. The four I identify here emerged as most useful over two iterations of teaching the course.

35. Multiple accounts (that tell multiple stories) are used in many of the research studies designed to explore and teach students' historical thinking. See, for example, Robert B. Bain, "'They Thought The World Was Flat?: Applying The Principles of *How People Learn* in Teaching High School History,'" in *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom*, ed. M. Suzanne Donovan and John D. Bransford (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2005); Ralph P. Ferretti, Charles D. MacArthur, and Cynthia M. Okolo, "'Teaching for Historical Understanding in Inclusive Classrooms,'" *Learning Disability Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 59-71; Peter Lee and Rosalyn Ashby, "'Progression In Historical Understanding Among Students Ages 7-14,'" in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

36. Some could be, of course, especially given the dated texts that do not take into account recent scholarship or carelessly written texts. For a glaring example of this, see Kevin Sieff, "'Virginia 4<sup>th</sup>-Grade Textbook Criticized Over Claims On Black Confederate Soldiers,'" *Washington Post*, 20 October 2010, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/19/AR2010101907974.html>>.

37. Ira Berlin, "'American Slavery in History and Memory and the Search For Social Justice,'" *Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (March 2004): 1263.

38. Cf. Sam Wineburg, "'On the Reading of Historical Texts: Notes on the Breach between School and Academy,'" *American Educational Research Journal* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 495-520. Other studies show that a sense of time and sequence is a core aspect of historical mindedness and that this can be taught; see, for example, Fillpot.

39. For a study that found fourth- and fifth-graders likely to mix fantasy with fact in telling historical stories, see Bruce VanSledright and Jere Brophy, "'Storytelling, Imagination, and Fanciful Elaboration in Children's Historical Reconstructions,'" *American Educational Research Journal* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 837-859.

40. Examples of studies investigating students use of evidence include: Ashby, Lee, and Shemilt; Keith C. Barton, "'I Just Kinda Know': Elementary Students' Ideas About Historical Evidence,'" *Theory and Research in Social Education* 25, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 407-430; VanSledright, *In Search of America's Past*.

41. Project Zero, n.d.

42. Elise Fillpot, "'Applying KWL Guides to Sources with Elementary Students,'" *Teaching Guides*, <<http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/teaching-guides/21806>>.

43. John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, and Rodney R. Cocking, eds., *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2000).

44. Thomas D. Fallace, Ashley D. Biscoe, and Jennifer L. Perry, "'Second Graders Thinking Historically: Theory into Practice,'" *Journal of Social Studies Research* 31, no.1 (Spring 2007): 44-53.

45. For another set of "second-order concepts" such as these, see Peter J. Lee, "'Putting Principles Into Practice: Understanding History,'" in *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom*, ed. M. Suzanne Donovan and John D. Bransford (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2005), 31-77.

46. The accompanying rubric included that "Candidates and scorers should consult the 'Historical and Social Sciences Analysis Skills'...of the History-Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools" to identify such skills.

47. Sid Fleishman, *By the Great Horn Spoon* (New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 1988).
48. Jennifer James, "Teachers as Protectors: Making Sense of Preservice Teachers' Resistance to Interpretation in Elementary History Teaching," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 36, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 172-205.
49. *Ibid.*, 184.
50. Schweber.